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ABSTRACT

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program is intended to provide Australian workers with the language, literacy, and numeracy skills needed to meet their current and ongoing employment and training needs. A research methodology based on the principles of naturalistic inquiry was used to examine the extent to which WELL projects have been undertaken in Tasmania and assumptions about the program's resources and delivery. Statistical information from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training, and Youth Affairs (DETYA) were analyzed, and interviews were conducted with a range of officers from DETYA, industry training advisory bodies (ITABs), registered training organizations (RTOs), and workplace training officers at four training sites across Tasmania. The study established that Tasmanian enterprises, ITABs, and RTOs take substantial advantage of the WELL program and value its contribution. WELL was found to play a vital role in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages by enabling access, improving communication, and promoting a training culture leading to wider workplace training. Underlying assumptions about WELL resources and delivery were shaped by concepts of literacy. Although a degree of enterprise, ITAB, and RTO reliance on WELL was discovered, the program was found to generate a proactive outlook. More extensive promotion of the WELL program's benefits was recommended. (56 references.) (MN)



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ALNARC

# Concepts of Literacy:

## The role of WELL

**Pat Millar**

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**Concepts of Literacy: The role of WELL**

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium
(ALNARC)

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# Executive Summary

## 1. The project

This project of the Tasmanian centre of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) investigates the role of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program, administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. The study involves investigating underlying assumptions about resources and delivery, and the extent to which Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are reliant on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs.

The findings of the investigation contribute to the development of a framework for ongoing evaluation of the role of the WELL Programme and of literacy and numeracy components in national training packages. The findings also add to understanding of communications aspects of working life, of the work itself, and communications needs of individual and groups of workers.

## 2. The literature

The literature on literacy as social practice, integrated or embedded in the social context, is examined. In the literature on workplace training, literacy and numeracy are regarded as vital underpinning skills.

In Tasmania recent investigations show that industry believes a significant number of employees do not have the literacy and numeracy skills required by workplace change.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program aims at providing workers with language, literacy and numeracy skills to meet their current and ongoing employment and training needs. In the literature there are many reports on WELL projects, overwhelmingly claiming successful outcomes.

## 3. Methodology

The principles of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1985) form the basis of the methodology chosen for the study.

In order to achieve the objectives of the project research questions were developed. Phase 1 of the project focuses on the first question: *To what extent have WELL projects been undertaken in Tasmania?* Phase 2 investigates perceptions of the WELL Programme and its effects, underlying assumptions about resources and delivery, the extent to which ITABs, RTOs and workplaces depend on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs, and the alternatives which may be necessary. Interviews about recent or current WELL

projects were conducted with a range of officers from DETYA, ITABs, RTOs, and with workplace training officers at four sites. The collected data was then analysed.

## 4. Findings

Tasmanian enterprises, ITABs and RTOs take substantial advantage of the WELL Programme and value its contribution. There is room for more extensive promotion of the program's benefits, as some enterprises may believe it has more of an educative focus rather than a workplace skills focus. Financial issues connected with training funding may be a disincentive for some enterprises. The take-up of the WELL Programme, and the outcomes of WELL projects, are reflections of people's understanding of literacy and the implications of literacy factors in the workplace.

At Statewide Independent Wholesalers WELL-funded literacy and numeracy training is believed to have made the workplace more efficient, more effective, more competitive, and more capable of responding to the demands of technological change. The company has embarked on wider vocational training because of the success of their WELL projects.

Metro is the largest bus operating company in Tasmania. It is a workplace undergoing cultural change. Their WELL training projects have made all levels of the company more aware of the possibilities of training.

Devonfield Enterprises is a not-for-profit organisation that caters for the needs of people with disabilities, mostly intellectual. Although organisations do not normally receive WELL funding after three consecutive years, Devonfield has had funding for five years. The enterprise attributes this to the significant outcomes achieved there. These outcomes are not only vocational, but are connected to aspects of an individual's sense of personal growth and social identity. The concept of literacy at Devonfield is thus justifiably broader than the primarily employment-oriented concept which emerges from interviews at the other sites.

The X Industry Training Board of Tasmania is both an industry training advisory body and a registered training organisation. The ITAB received WELL funding in 2000 to develop a CD-ROM training resource. Examination of the process of development of this resource offers insights into the way in which concepts of literacy held by industry may in some ways vary from those of the WELL Programme.

## 5. Conclusions

Findings from this study show that the role of the Workplace English Language and Literacy program is regarded as being of great importance in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. This role is defined in terms of enabling access, improving communication, creating a constructive awareness of communication skills in training, and promoting a training culture which leads to wider and more effective training in the workplace.

*WELL plays a vital role in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages, by*

- *enabling access,*
- *improving communication, and*
- *promoting a training culture leading to wider workplace*

Enterprises', Industry Training Boards' and RTOs' underlying assumptions about resources and delivery are shaped by concepts of literacy. These concepts range across a spectrum: from highly-developed ones through to narrower concepts shaped by public perceptions of literacy as a basic skills issue focused on deficits, or by industry core values relating to productivity and cost-effectiveness.

*Underlying asssumptions about resources and delivery are shaped by concepts of literacy*

Enterprises, Industry Training Boards and Registered Training Organisations overwhelmingly believe that the Workplace English Language and Literacy program is meeting its objectives and that it has made a highly significant contribution to the field of workplace English language and literacy training. There is a degree of reliance on WELL, but this nevertheless generates a pro-active outlook.

*This is a degree of reliance on WELL, but the program generates a proactive outlook*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The project

This project forms part of the continued national research undertaken in 2000 by the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC), into aspects of the incorporation of English language, literacy and numeracy competencies into the competency standards of training packages. The research was funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). The Tasmanian project was conducted by the Tasmanian ALNARC centre, the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, Launceston.

## 1.2 Aims of the project

The project aims to investigate the role of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program, administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. This involves investigating underlying assumptions about resources and delivery, and the extent to which Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are reliant on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs.

The project addresses issues such as learning outcomes, WELL programs that have progressed to second and third years of implementation, and the perceptions of ITABs, enterprise managers, and RTOs as to the value and effectiveness of the programs and how they could be improved.

## 1.3 Significance of the research

The findings of the investigation will contribute to the development of a framework for ongoing evaluation of the role of the WELL Programme and of literacy and numeracy components in national training packages. The findings will also add to understanding of communications aspects of working life, and of the work itself, and communications needs of individual and groups of workers.

## 1.4 Summary

The project aims to investigate the role of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. Underlying assumptions about resources and delivery are investigated, as well as the extent to which Industry Training Advisory Bodies and Registered Training Organisations are reliant on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs.

# 2. Literature review

## 2.1 Introduction

Literacy is closely involved with the whole issue of language and learning. Understandings of literacy connect basic skills acquisition and development to all aspects of an individual's and a community's sense of social identity (Freire 1985; Fairclough 1989; Gee 1990; Falk 1994). Literacy is recognised as social practice (Street 1995; Gee 1996; Barton & Hamilton 1998), integrated or embedded in the social context (Baynham 1995), and therefore taking on various forms and purposes for individuals and for society (Hamilton, Barton & Ivanic 1994).

> *Such a conceptualisation de-emphasises a focus on individual skill that locates literacy within a human capital model and accordingly allows individuals to be characterised as 'deficient'. Rather, it focuses more positively on the many different ways in which people individually and collectively actually use literacy in their everyday lives. Recent research conducted within and across a range of contexts including community and workplaces (Prinsloo & Breier 1996, Hull 1997, Barton & Hamilton 1998, Searle 1999, Castleton 2000) demonstrates the various ways in which people operate within diverse 'communities of practice' that are characterised by a mutual exchange of skills and practices, including literacy.* (McDonald & Castleton 2000: 1)

The workplace is one of the contexts, or communities of practice, which involves its own particular kind of literacy. Like other literacy practices, those of the workplace change, and new workplace literacies are acquired through processes of formal and informal learning and sense making (Barton & Hamilton 1998).

## 2.2 Overview of literacy and numeracy in the workplace

Literacy and numeracy are vital underpinning skills for effective and efficient training (DEETYA [Department of Employment, Education and Youth Affairs] 1996; Fitzpatrick & Roberts 1997; ANTA 1998). Literacy and numeracy components of tasks are integrated into all aspects of working life, involving skills both at a basic level and those required for more complex tasks (Askov & Aderman 1991; Courtenay & Mawer 1995). The connection between literacy and numeracy and job performance is highly complex (Hull 1993, 1997, 1999, 2000). Language and literacy inclusive training is seen as having a positive impact on workplace issues such as worker morale, confidence to communicate, and management/shopfloor relations (DEETYA 1996).

The changing nature of work in the twenty-first century increasingly impacts on workplace literacy, which not only involves basic skills — reading,

writing or mathematics — but the application of these skills to areas such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving. Evidence points to increasing reliance upon technology in nearly every occupational category (Smith 2000). While there is controversy over whether technology has created more jobs with increased literacy needs or more with decreased needs (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear 1996), the use of technology does modify and create new literacies for the workplace:

> *For example, computer text documents can be written at multiple levels (i.e., simple form, moderately elaborated form, expert form) and be embedded with supports (i.e., visual and auditory glossaries as well as extended links to help screens, tutorials, and other information) ... New literacies require the user to search and navigate through higher levels of visual and print detail, requiring new or at least modified interpretation, search, and decision-making skills.*
>
> (Mikulecky 2000: 379)

New technologies afford workers immediate access to many kinds of information. This accessibility requires critical analysis skills (Smith 2000). Hull et al. (1996) argue that 'a literate identity means ... being able ... to dip appropriately and as needed into a wide and deep repertoire of situated ways of using written language and other forms of representation in order to carry out a work-related activity' (p. 204). The term multiliteracies is used to describe the multiple abilities involved (Kibby 2000). The literacy and numeracy skills required for tasks integrated into the workplace context are believed to be more effectively acquired not in a separate learning or training context, but actually on the job, and on the work task (Falk & Millar 2001).

## 2.3 The Tasmanian context

Wickert's 1989 survey of adult literacy in Australia, updated and finalised in 1995 (Wickert & Kevin 1995) found that the greatest literacy problems were to be found in two segments of the population: those who had attended school for fewer than six years, and people older than sixty. Two recent reports concerning literacy issues in Tasmania indicate that low school retention rates and an ageing population and workforce continue to impact on workplace literacy.

*Post Compulsory Education in Tasmania* (1999), commissioned by the Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training, included the following:

> *Of all the Australian States, Tasmania has the lowest retention to year 12 and the lowest participation in both vocational education and training and higher education.*
>
> (Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training 1999)

*Hang on Tight*, a joint ANTA and DVET report published in 1998 by TAFE Tasmania, reviews the significance of language, literacy and numeracy in Tasmania and includes interviews with enterprises on the role of literacy skills in the workplace. One finding indicates that industries traditionally only requiring

basic literacy and numeracy skills believe that workplace changes already did or would soon require higher level literacy and numeracy skills from all workers, and that a significant number of employees did not have these skills. Another finding indicates that many employers feel literacy and numeracy assistance is really more for the employee than being equally for the enterprise (ANTA/DVET 1998). Crowley (2000) considers the implications of these reports for employment and training in Tasmania.

## 2.4 The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme is an initiative managed by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), with the aim of providing workers with language, literacy and numeracy skills to meet their current and ongoing employment and training needs. Funding is available for training that is integrated with vocational training via partnerships between the industry and providers.

WELL defines literacy as:

> *the ability to read and use written information as well as to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. Literacy also includes numeracy, such as the recognition and use of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking with reading and writing.*
>
> (Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme *Applicant's Guidelines and Information 2000 – 2001, 3.5)*

*The Applicant's Guidelines* are explicit with regard to the program's target group:

> *The* ***WELL TARGET GROUP*** *is employees with the greatest need for workplace English language and literacy assistance in the context of occupational and workplace training requirements. The term applies to those employees whose English language, literacy and numeracy proficiency is below the level where a person should be able to communicate in English with sufficient accuracy to meet minimum workplace industry competency standards. Generally this refers to employees at levels 1 and 2 of the National Reporting System.*
>
> *The Project should target workers in greatest need, taking into account the worker's need for improved language and literacy skills in order to remain or progress in employment (including avoiding displacement). This may include a need to improve language and literacy skills in order to undertake further training that is required to remain competitive in the labour market.*
>
> (Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme *Applicant's Guidelines and Information 2000 – 2001, 3.5)*

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*The Applicant's Guidelines* report that:

> *Where English language, literacy and numeracy training has been undertaken, enterprises have reported:*
>
> - *better workplace skills;*
> - *more effective communication;*
> - *increased involvement in training and skill development programmes;*
> - *improved occupational health and safety; and*
> - *increased productivity.*
>
> (Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme *Applicant's Guidelines and Information 2000 – 2001, 1.1)*

A 1995 review of the WELL Programme provided a limited time frame overview of its impact (Baylis 1995). Key findings were that the program was meeting its objectives and that it had made a significant contribution to the field of workplace English language and literacy training in its first three years of operation.

Many reports have been published documenting the use of WELL programs across a range of industries (for example, ATCFITB 1994, Cunningham & Manidis 1995, Jeffreys et al. 1996, Wakefield 1997, Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales 1997, Del Grosso 2000). Published reports on WELL projects in Tasmania are relatively few. Among these are Workplace Communication Skills and Workplace Communication Training: Case studies (Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board 1998a & b) and Applying the NRS to an Industry Training Package (Mitchell 1999). WELL activities are viewed as substantially successful and continuation and expansion of the program have been recommended.

Tasmanian guides or resources which have been published include learning manuals written for Cadbury's (Wressell 1997; Huxley 1997), a course which aims to assist learners to gain the knowledge and skills to implement a quality assurance program in their own workplace (Bennett et al. 1998), and a guide written for Blundstone Australia in Hobart, which discusses the importance of communication skills especially in the textile, clothing and footwear industry (Cotton 1999). Of particular interest to the present investigation are certain industry-prepared guides and resources which relate directly to the sites selected for research. The Tasmanian Transport and Distribution Industry Training Board produced a guide for implementation of the training package (Cotton 2000) — a project funded through WELL. The last section focuses on the embedded language and literacy in competency standards and gives an example of how to identify the language, literacy and numeracy requirements of a task.

## 2.5 Summary

Literacy is social practice, integrated or embedded in the social context. The workplace is one of many contexts or communities of practice which involves its own particular kind of literacies. Literacy and numeracy are vital underpinning skills for effective and efficient training.

In Tasmania, workplace literacy is affected by low school retention rates and an ageing population and workforce. Recent investigations show that industry believes a significant number of employees do not have the literacy and numeracy skills required by workplace change.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme is an initiative managed by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, with the aim of providing workers with language, literacy and numeracy skills to meet their current and ongoing employment and training needs. In the literature there are many reports on WELL projects, overwhelmingly claiming successful outcomes.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

Within the qualitative inquiry strategy of this study, the principles of the theme of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1985) form the basis of its methodology. This is a discovery-oriented approach with no predetermined constraints on outcomes (Patton 1990).

## 3.2 The research questions

The study investigates the role of Workplace English Language and Literacy programs in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. In order to achieve the objectives of the project, four research questions were developed.

These were:

1. To what extent have WELL projects been undertaken in Tasmania?
2. How do enterprise managers, ITABs and RTOs perceive the program and its effects?
3. What are the underlying assumptions about resources and delivery?
4. To what extent do ITABs, RTOs and workplaces depend on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs, and what alternatives be necessary?

## 3.3 Data collection

Phase 1 of the project focused on the first question: *To what extent have WELL projects been undertaken in Tasmania?* Statistical information was obtained from WELL Programme officers in the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) in Tasmania and Canberra. Discussions on the subject, including opinions about the take-up of the program, took place with the Tasmanian WELL Programme officer, with the National Project Manager (WELL) at Transport and Distribution Training Australia, and with officers from three major industry training advisory bodies in Tasmania: the X Industry Training Board of Tasmania, Tasmanian Tourism Industry Training Board, and the Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board. Opinion was also sought from five trainers at Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, and from three vocational trainers at TAFE Tasmania. These discussions also served as a useful informational preliminary to Phase 2.

Phase 2 investigated perceptions of the WELL Programme and its effects, underlying assumptions about resources and delivery, the extent to which ITABs, RTOs and workplaces depend on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs, and the alternatives which may be necessary. It was decided to focus on three workplaces where Workplace English Language and Literacy

projects are playing, or have recently played, a role in supporting provision of literacy and numeracy in training packages, and where perceptions of effects, underlying assumptions and degree of dependency could be examined.

We interviewed two state Industry Training Advisory Body officers covering two of the industries, and also obtained opinion via email from a national ITAB (Transport and Distribution). At one workplace we interviewed the Human Resources Manager; at the other two we interviewed training officers. We interviewed five trainers/teachers involved with WELL-funded programs in these workplaces.

The workplaces were:

- Statewide Independent Wholesalers Distribution Warehouse at Prospect, Tasmania,
- Metro in Hobart, and
- Devonfield in Devonport.

A fourth focus was:

- the X Industry Training Board of Tasmania in Hobart, which has been involved since 1999 in the development of a WELL-funded CD- ROM resource. One of the researchers on our project is on the steering committee for this resource development. It was decided to include an intensive focus on this particular resource development in order to provide further information on the questions in Phase 2. The executive officer of the ITAB was interviewed. Notes were taken at steering committee meetings. Comment obtained from an officer of the national ITAB and from a DETYA nominee, both of whom were also on the steering committee, was later augmented via email.

We used an interview-guide approach, where topics and issues are specified in advance, and the interviewer then decides sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview. This followed a semi-structured interview schedule procedure with general questions for discussion, supported by probe questions:

1. What WELL programs are you/have you been involved with?
2. What is/was the nature of the projects funded by the program?
   - (a) Describe details of the program
   - (b) Organisation
   - (c) Delivery
   - (d) Materials
   - (e) Human resources
3. What are/were the objectives of the WELL Programme?
4. Has the program been meeting its objectives effectively
   - (a) What have been the outcomes of the program?
   - (b) Are these outcomes consistent with the program objectives?
   - (c) What has been the impact of the program on the development of the field of workplace English language and literacy training at the site/s involved?

5. Have you done a detailed evaluation of the program?
6. How successful has the WELL Programme been, do you think?
7. What are your reasons for thinking this?

The line of questioning/discussion was tailored to the context. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcripts produced. Member-checking, or 'verification with the respondent groups of the constructions that are developing as a result of data collected and analysed' (Mertens 1998: 182), was carried out by providing transcripts of interviews to respondents, who in most cases then elaborated on points raised in the interviews.

## 3.4 Data analysis

The collected data was analysed and answers to key questions sought:

1. How effective has the WELL Programme been in achieving its stated aims?
2. Why do enterprises continue (or do not continue) to second and third years of implementation?
3. How effective has it been in supporting enterprise objectives?
4. How effective has it been in providing workers with language, literacy & numeracy skills (LL&N) that underpin workplace needs?
5. How effective has it been in supporting the implementation of training packages?
6. How effective has it been in contributing to the development of a training culture in enterprises?
7. Do enterprises consider that they have 'value for money' for their in-kind contributions?
8. What factors contribute to success or otherwise of programs?
9. How do enterprise managers, ITABs and RTOs perceive strengths and weaknesses of the program, based on their experience?
10. How could the program be improved?

## 3.5 Summary

In order to achieve the objectives of the project, research questions were developed. Phase 1 of the project focused on the first question: *To what extent have WELL projects been undertaken in Tasmania?* We had discussions with a range of officers from DETYA, ITABs, RTOs, and workplace training officers. Phase 2 investigated perceptions of the WELL Programme and its effects, underlying assumptions about resources and delivery, the extent to which ITABs, RTOs and workplaces depend on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs, and the alternatives which may be necessary. Interviews were conducted at four sites about recent or current WELL projects. Further information was obtained from associated ITABs and RTOs. The collected data was then analysed.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

Information collected in interviews was analysed and organised into sections corresponding to the phases of the research. Phase 1, the extent to which WELL projects have been taken up in Tasmania, is reported on first. Phase 2 was an investigation of perceptions of the WELL Programme and its effects, underlying assumptions about resources and delivery, the extent to which ITABs, RTOs and workplaces depend on WELL funding to address literacy and numeracy needs, and the alternatives which may be necessary. Findings here have been grouped under the heading of 'Perceptions, assumptions and reliance'.

## 4.2 WELL projects in Tasmania

Funding for WELL training programs in the states is allocated on a population basis. With Tasmania's low participation rate in the workforce, there is actually a larger number of funding dollars available per worker than in the bigger states where unemployment rates are lower, and Tasmania normally fully uses its allocation. (Tasmanian DETYA state officer, May 2001)

Tasmania's population includes smaller numbers of people from a non-English speaking background, compared to the other states, but on the other hand its school retention rate is comparatively lower.

> *There is a need for WELL, to support the training package set-up. But there are misconceptions about WELL, about what language and literacy mean. People think WELL is about reading and writing. They see WELL as having more of an education focus rather than as about skills, or the skills workers might require to operate in the workplace appropriately ... I wonder if enterprises wouldn't make more use of WELL funding if they realised the range of things it can be used for. And that it's not just about workers of non-English speaking background either. That's another misunderstanding. Many enterprises say, 'We don't have a lot of non-English speaking background people ... So we don't need it.'*
>
> (Executive officer, Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board, March 2001).

The Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board used WELL funding in 1998 to investigate the take-up of workplace communication training within the community and health services industry (Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board 1998a and 1998b). The project found that only a small number of community and health service organisations had implemented workplace communication training programs in 1998, and this low take up number was consistent with that of past years.

*Part of our WELL project then was to promote WELL, and the possibilities for WELL funding.*

(Executive officer, Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board, March 2001)

Other ITABs are mindful of the need to promote the WELL Programme. The Tasmanian Transport and Distribution Industry Training Board is part of its national ITAB's WELL network. The national project manager circulates a bi-monthly newsletter highlighting activities of the network, and promotes the extension of professional development to reading the units of competence for literacy and numeracy.

*In our industry, delivery of WELL programs has been on the basis of enterprises identifying a language, literacy and numeracy need through the training package implementation process and then making links with RTOs to create a collaborative effort in training delivery. For this to be successful enterprise trainers must carry out some form of initial assessment, and must know what to look for when selecting a RTO for delivery. In other words, they must have selection criteria other than dollars. Negotiation skills for both RTO and enterprise personnel are imperative in setting up the delivery framework. There must be a commitment to training and in particular language, literacy and numeracy training from all parties and most importantly from management — both RTO and enterprise management.*

(National project manager [WELL], Transport and Distribution Training Australia, March 2001)

It is often the RTOs, however, that tend to drive applications for WELL funding, and some trainers feel their work would be helped by more promotion of the program. 'WELL funding is not marketed very well. There's not a lot of understanding of what it's about in the community' (literacy trainer, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, 2000). DETYA is aware of this understanding gap in Tasmania, and is seeking to promote WELL further (Tasmanian DETYA state officer, May 2001).

Apart from promotional gaps, there may be a financial disincentive which stops some enterprises from accessing WELL funding. For a second round of WELL funding, the enterprise must contribute fifty per cent of the total cost. 'A lot of training is all around dollars. Doing WELL applications and reports is time-consuming, and at the end of the day enterprises want to feel they've got a reasonable chance of getting something out of it. They may feel they get more out of the New Apprenticeship scheme' (executive officer, Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board, March 2001). This ITAB is considering an idea of cluster applications for WELL funding — 'small employer groups, all from one sector, working together, combining ... It would make it more feasible, in terms of putting in an application. Two or three organisations, for example childcare centres, located in a region, working together' (executive officer, Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board, March 2001).

The Tasmanian Tourism Industry Training Board used a variation of the 'cluster' project idea in a 1998 WELL project, which aimed at providing support and information, about communication skills requirements in the tourism and hospitality industry, to industry and industry groups on the Tasman Peninsula (Tasmanian Tourism Industry Training Board, unpublished report, 1998).

> *The larger operators have an infrastructure to implement programs which focus on literacy and communication. With the smaller operators it's rather more difficult. That's why with the Tasman Peninsula we targeted the region rather than just one operator.*
>
> (Executive officer, Tasmanian Tourism Industry Training Board, February 2001)

However, the WELL funding for this project was secured by the ITAB, in conjunction with Tourism Training Victoria.

The financial issue is a fundamental concern to business.

> *The ideal place for WELL funding is to make sure existing employees' literacy and numeracy skills are up to the level where they are better able to commence Certificate III under the new apprenticeship scheme. But in entering the new apprenticeship scheme with already a Certificate II qualification, they lose the commencement payment.*
>
> (Literacy trainer, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, 2000)

Time is money. Training officers in enterprises are cautious about training which takes employees off the job for long periods of time. This may be a particular issue in areas such as transport: 'There may be a problem with getting productivity. With transport, trainees aren't always on site. They're off in a bus somewhere' (literacy trainer, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania). Concerns about productivity cause some employers to feel that literacy and numeracy assistance is of more value to the employee than to the enterprise.

A related concern over enterprise time spent on literacy programs involves the National Reporting System (NRS). In workplaces using WELL funding, trainers are required to incorporate the NRS measurement tool to report on outcomes of their training delivery to DETYA. For some, this may be an issue. 'The NRS is very complex and not a lot of training on how to use it has occurred' (literacy trainer, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania). It has been shown, however, that a collaborative undertaking between the trainer, the enterprise training officer, and other in-house sources of expertise, can effectively develop and customise an assessment tool which can be used to assess individuals without taking them off the job for a long period of time (Mitchell 1999).

Finally, the take-up of the WELL Programme, and the outcomes of WELL projects, are reflections of people's understanding of literacy and the implications of literacy factors in the workplace. While training package compilers recognise literacy and numeracy competencies as underpinning skills in on-the-job performance, some vocational and educational training (VET) sector trainers are still coming to terms with adaptation to integrated literacy and


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numeracy training. Literacy and numeracy may be associated with 'theory', rather than as factors that affect workers' performance in the workplace: 'Literacy problems come up with Certificate III. Up to then, the training is mostly practical with only a small part of theory' (cookery trainer, TAFE Tasmania).

> *In relation to training packages, there's probably sometimes only lip service to language and literacy issues and how those could be addressed.*
>
> (Executive officer, Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board, March 2001)

'Literacy' is often conceived of in deficit terms and is associated with social stigma. ITAB officers and RTO trainers avoid using the term 'literacy', and find they reach people more effectively by referring to 'workplace communication'.

> *Individuals are often reluctant to come forward. The employer has to identify people with problems, take them to one side. Focusing on "workplace communication", rather than calling it a literacy program, makes it easier.*
>
> (Executive officer, Tasmanian Tourism Industry Training Board, February 2001)

There may, however, still be resistance.

> *Most of the operators ... reported that their staff did not need training. The few that did have staff who identified with communication skills difficulties said that their employees were reluctant to undertake tutorial assistance ... The Tasman Peninsula is a close-knit community. This fact prevents people who actually need assistance identifying themselves for fear of repercussions from their peer group.*
>
> (Tourism Training Tasmania, unpublished report, 1998)

At a deeper level, there are misconceptions about what language and literacy mean.

> *One of the main issues is that everybody thinks they know all about literacy. This is particularly prevalent in the VET field because many VET trainers are trainers because they have the skills — a hospitality trainer is so because he has industry experience as a cook; therefore he can teach it. He can read and write; therefore it is assumed that he can teach that too.*
>
> (DETYA officer, February 2001)

Literacy is seen to be of critical importance in 'theory' or 'book learning', but its close involvement with the whole spectrum of learning is not generally recognised. It is often not realised that workers with limited literacy skills are disadvantaged in training, even if little actual reading and writing is involved. The very language of the training may present problems to these workers.

> *Literacy and numeracy support is crucial for some workers. Pre-training support, for some. I've heard that comment in relation to the cleaning sector, where one RTO has had to simplify the assessment tools to make sure the trainees are able to follow what's going on, what they need to do, and for them to understand exactly what the unit of competence is.*
>
> (Executive officer, Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Training Board, 2001)

Workers who do not have basic skills problems may also find themselves at a disadvantage because the literacies of the workplace are changing. Older workers educated at a time when rote learning was the norm are often finding that they need to develop critical analysis skills to cope effectively with the impact of the Information Age on the workplace, where the use of technology has modified and created new literacies. If these workers have been doing the job for some time, it may not be realised that their difficulty with change in the workplace has its roots in literacy factors. Understanding of this highly complex connection between literacy and numeracy and job performance will take time to percolate through industry.

In workplaces where WELL projects have taken place, however, a more enlightened attitude tends to prevail. Language and literacy inclusive training is seen as having a positive impact on workplace issues such as worker morale, confidence to communicate, management and shopfloor relations, teamwork and problem solving.

## 4.3 Perceptions, assumptions and reliance

The WELL Programme is highly valued by ITAB officers and RTO literacy trainers. Human resource managers and training officers at enterprises that have been involved with WELL training and resource projects also speak very positively of WELL. Benefits from WELL-funded training are identified as: enhancement of individual communication skills, increases in worker confidence and improvements in worker morale, evidence of greater staff initiative after training, widening access to training opportunities, improvement in meeting participation, and development of a strong team spirit.

> *The workplace communication training elevated some of our untrained staff to higher levels of literacy and comprehension. Other training became easier and more effective for them with resultant rises in confidence and self-esteem.*
>
> (Enterprise manager, contacted through the Tasmanian Community, Property and Health Services Industry Training Board, 2001)

Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, perceives the WELL Programme as enhancing equity in the workplace:

> *WELL funding supports the development of language, literacy and numeracy inclusive training and assessment practices. The focus on inclusive assessment practices ensures fair and flexible assessment.*
>
> (Team leader, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, 2000)

Workplace Learning Services has had a primary role in delivery of WELL-funded training for the past ten years. This has been achieved through the establishment of partnerships with a range of small and large enterprises across all industry sectors in the state. Their involvement with WELL-funded resource development is limited, however.

> *It's hard to comment on how resources developed with WELL support contribute to training package delivery, because most of our EBATs*

*[enterprise-based assessors/trainers] would use the resources of the particular workplace they're working in for language, literacy and numeracy gap training ... like relevant regulations and policies, or manufacturer's instructions, specifications, standard operating procedures, occupational health and safety regulations specific to the site, company record keeping procedures, pay advice forms, site specific non-conformance, enterprise specific calculations and so on. The choice of these resources is determined by the requirements of the competency standards.*

*With regard to support materials for training packages generally, where there are non-endorsed components available for a training package, the learning resources are scanned for applicability to gap training provision, but with an eye to process and ideas rather than content.*

(Team Leader, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, 2000)

Transport and Distribution Training Australia received three years of WELL funding to develop a national strategy which has now gone out to all State ITABs, and approximately 260 enterprises and RTOs that at present constitute Transport and Distribution Training's WELL Network.

*Language, literacy and numeracy are embedded in the competencies at all levels of the Transport and Distribution Training Package. To date, the national ITAB has produced one resource, Delivering the Goods, which looks specifically at language, literacy and numeracy in the package. The Tasmanian Transport and Distribution Industry Training Board put together a guide for implementation of the package which makes particular reference for those employees who require language, literacy and numeracy enhancement.* [Refer Cotton 2000]

(National project manager, WELL, Transport and Distribution Training Australia, 2001)

### 4.3.1 WELL-funded training: Statewide Independent Wholesalers

Statewide Independent Wholesalers Limited is owned by Woolworths Limited and Northern Wholesalers Co-operative Society. The company warehouses and supplies grocery, frozen and chilled lines and general merchandise to 300 stores throughout Tasmania. The distribution centre at Prospect supplies dry grocery, chilled and general merchandise. The frozen and chilled distribution centre at Breadalbane supplies frozen foods. Staffing consists of 130 permanent and casual.

Job functions in the transport and distribution services industry have become more complex. Workers now need to understand and use the new technologies, comply with quality assurance procedures and also with a wide range of regulations and policies such as occupational health and safety regulations.

> *The bulk of the workforce in the industry, however, has been working in it for some time and many were drawn to it by the fact that it was an industry that did not require post secondary school training or qualifications... The Transport and Distribution Training Package was designed so that language, literacy and numeracy is embedded within the competencies. However even with units at Level 1, language, literacy and numeracy skills are assumed at a level that may not have previously been achieved by some workers in the course of their life experience.*
>
> (Del Grosso 2000)

Statewide's first round of WELL funding in October 1996 was aimed at improving the literacy and numeracy skills of distribution centre employees. Employees volunteered to participate in the assessment process. The training officer said:

> *We just invited people who wanted to improve their skills. People were apprehensive when it first came out. They'd say, 'Oh you're going to teach me to read and write!' But it was kept confidential, nobody knew who was doing what. It was all kept confidential by TAFE or Adult Ed Services as it was then. They got people to come forward, and as more people came forward others followed. TAFE identified quite a few ... not major problems, but people had small problems in their numeracy and literacy, and TAFE helped them greatly with things like that. They also helped them with report writing, and how to do a memo. Some people had no experience with that sort of work. TAFE showed them how to do memorandums — how you set it out. In general there weren't problems with literacy at the basic level, but there were some ... low average, I suppose you'd say. Even simple adding up and subtraction — which is important in the workplace, because if you're handling amounts of stock, and somebody's ordered something ... 'If I take 34 cartons out of 50 cartons, how many would I have left?' Basic numeracy like that. And some people did get quite a lot of benefit from that.*

Seventy-four permanent warehouse staff were assessed. Thirty-seven employees required some form of training in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics and general communication. Training commenced in June 1997 and was completed in February 1998.

> *I think it's a good program. Basically because some of the staff downstairs ... the feedback we got was very positive. It helped morale. It helped out some of the older people especially. I think in the older times, people just slipped through the net. You could get away with it. It wasn't worried about so much years ago. There wasn't much emphasis on it. They'd go on for years, always having to cover their tracks as they went along.*
>
> (Training officer, distribution centre, Statewide Independent Wholesalers, August 2000)

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Statewide also used the 1996 round of WELL funding to develop a comprehensive staff training manual, making it simpler and easier to read and understand.

> *Workplace safety is very important at Statewide. It's very dangerous downstairs and one of my roles as training officer is to make sure people understand the workplace safety issues. That's where the numeracy and literacy comes in. If people can't read, they can't read the posters around the place. We have noticed the difference, since we've beefed up our OH&S training. People are more concerned about possibilities for accidents.*
>
> (Training officer, distribution centre, Statewide Independent Wholesalers, August 2000)

Statewide remained a participant in the WELL Programme following the release of the Transport and Distribution Training Package in 1998. In a second round of WELL funding, Statewide and the same enterprise-based teacher who had worked with them before, conducted information meetings in March 1999 to find out if any employees were interested in being assessed to Certificate I and Certificate II in Transport and Distribution (Warehousing) units. It was not compulsory for staff to do it. 'We had a very good success rate with that, with people wanting to do it' (Training Officer, Distribution Centre, Statewide Independent Wholesalers, August 2000). Sixty-six expressions of interest were received.

It was decided that the second round, of 160 hours, should be used to assess as many individuals as possible against Certificate I and Certificate II in Transport and Distribution (Warehousing) units, from the Transport and Distribution Training Package, and to provide training and support where needed for individuals whose communication skills may hinder their attainment of units. By August 2000, 69 employees had achieved Certificate I, 49 had achieved certificate II, and 20 had achieved Statements of Attainment at level II.

The enterprise-based teacher from TAFE Tasmania subsequently wrote a report, 'Applying the NRS to an Industry Training Package' (Mitchell 1999), which described the program in detail.

> *An integral, on-site trainer is in an ideal position to provide assistance in customising training packages while bearing in mind the language, literacy and numeracy needs of employees and the organisation ...*
>
> *The recognition of current competence and provision of training to fill gaps in individuals' knowledge and skills more directly helps the employee and gives clear outcomes to management who may not see the value of prolonged training courses.*
>
> (Mitchell 1999)

At this stage it is unlikely that Statewide will apply for further WELL funding. They have embarked on an extensive training program, however, both in the warehouse and in their transport section. The enterprise now has a greater

understanding of the skill requirements of its work, and of the variety and number of functions that reading and writing serve in its workplaces.

> *The training will be ongoing. But it all started from the WELL Programme and went on from there. Basically the WELL Programme launched us off. Training started off here as a very small operation, but it's right across the company now, not just in the warehouse. We have training in the freezer and chiller section at Breadalbane, the Prospect distribution centre, and also our three cash and carry divisions. At the moment we have about 140 people who are actually going through this other ongoing training. The average age ... our youngest trainee's 17, our oldest I believe is about 49. So we're across the board with our ages.*
>
> *The company has seen the benefits of training. If you have well-trained staff, obviously you have better communication. You have better product. And the staff are getting some recognition for what they're doing. Which also gives them a better outlook with regard to the company. The company's doing something for them, so hopefully in turn they'll give something back to the company.*
>
> (Training officer, distribution centre, Statewide Independent Wholesalers, August 2000)

Statewide's concept of literacy is shaped by the requirements of running a profitable business. Literacy training is seen to make the workplace more efficient, more effective, more competitive, and more capable of responding to the demands of technological change. This concept of literacy is constructed within a focus on targets and outcomes in work performance: 'You have better product.' The WELL Programme is credited with boosting morale in trainees, and the perception of this benefit is also constructed in corporate terms: 'They'll give something back to the company.' The personal benefit of literacy and numeracy training to individual employees is not the priority; however, this benefit too has undoubtedly been achieved through the WELL experience.

### 4.3.2 WELL-funded training: Metro

Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd is the largest bus operator in Tasmania, servicing the urban areas of Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and some surrounding municipalities. Metro Tasmania Pty. Ltd. is a state-owned company established in February 1998 within the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources. Metro functions under the same system of industry regulation as the rest of the passenger transport industry.

Metro was traditionally a male-dominated culture. In 2000 it had 415 drivers state-wide aged 21 and upward, and only a quarter of these were female. But a culture change is under way. Metro is presently involved in two years of affirmative action to hire females as drivers. There has been some backlash about this. Some male employees are disgruntled over the part-time nature of the work many of the women are getting, which is perceived to cut the overtime available to other drivers. There is also suspicion that women drivers are getting easier

routes. The women tend to be younger than the average male driver. A literacy trainer observed that not only do the women appear to be able to take care of themselves on the buses, they also have less need for literacy and numeracy support.

Applicants for employment go through a private recruitment agency. They have to be at least 21 years of age, because of driving experience requirements. As part of the application process they do a basic literacy and numeracy test. The test, as shown to an interviewer in August 2000, is short and arbitrary, but suffices to screen out applicants with considerable literacy and numeracy problems. On the basis of his experience with employees who have been with Metro since pre-test days, the human resources manager (August 2000) feels that those who have problems with the test would be mainly older applicants.

Because the recruitment process now contains the gatekeeping literacy and numeracy test, Metro has not always perceived that it had 'literacy needs' in its workforce (literacy trainer, Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, August 2000). This is an attitude not uncommon among Tasmanian enterprises, which often have limited ways of viewing the concept of workplace literacy. While they recognise the basic literacy functions involved in relatively simple, self-contained tasks such as copying, labelling, keyboarding and tallying, the role and importance of literacy in more complex functions often goes unrecognised. An awareness of the continuum of literacy functions often only comes after experience with a number of WELL projects.

Workplace Learning Services found, however, that Metro was receptive to concepts such as 'workplace communication' and 'team building'. Responding to these concepts, the company has been involved with WELL-funded training since 1996. The initial programs in 1996 and 1997 offered language, literacy and numeracy support — one-on-one assistance with reading, writing and spelling. The training was advertised in-house, and people signed up specifically for individualised teaching, the content of which was not tied to workplace activities.

This was followed in 1998 by customer service training for all employees over a two-year period. The trigger for this was the requirement to develop a new customer service charter. The training involved effective communication skills, negotiation, conflict resolution, internal/external customers, and team building. The one-to-one support was continued for any employees who wanted it.

The 1999 WELL Programme objectives were to provide training and recognition for staff with supervisory responsibilities. They did Frontline Management Certificate III. The RTO was Workplace Learning Services, TAFE Tasmania, working one-on-one or in small groups, on and off the job. One teacher was based with Metro over this period, and was in the workplace every Tuesday, allowing employees access to her. She feels she was able to give Metro a considerable amount of help with setting up this training.

From 1999, workplace training was attached to training package outcomes. Workplace Learning Services delivered frontline management training

at Certificate III level. The literacy aspects still involved basic reading and writing, but the context was now firmly based on the workplace, and the training was much more 'on the job'.

> *We were teaching them about the workplace, the terminology and the formatting side of it, and how to take what was in their head and put it on paper. They didn't really know how to do any of this — and they were at a supervisory level. We did reading/researching, writing, team building and workplace reports.*
>
> (Literacy trainer, Workplace Learning Services, May 2001)

The program met its objectives effectively, but with some difficulty with regard to work schedules.

> *The only problem with the delivery, and with meeting the time-frame, is that when you're doing on-the-job training there is a problem with getting productivity. The whole idea of on-the-job training is that you shouldn't be disrupting their work schedule at all. With transport, people aren't actually even on site — they're off in a bus somewhere. So the time-tabling to try and do training in a company where people are actually on the move, is much more difficult.*
>
> (ibid)

WELL funding has allowed eight supervisors to receive Statements of Attainment in all but occupational health and safety.

The main impact of the program, according to the human resources manager, has been to make all levels within Metro aware of the possibilities of training. The literacy trainer, in identifying the main benefit, said: 'Participants are very positive about the training. They are more comfortable in asking for assistance and willingly admit to their perceived problems'.

Concepts of literacy at Metro have been considerably developed as a result of WELL-funded training. A traditional workplace undergoing a cultural change, largely as a result of the government-employer's legislative requirements, it has revised its former attitude that there were no 'literacy needs' among its bus drivers and support staff. Metro now recognises that literacy aspects of training are fundamental. Modern public transport companies require documentation, record-keeping, and certification. Bus drivers now need to become adept and comfortable around paperwork. It is increasingly recognised that workers use literacy to explain, to take part in discussion around texts, to participate in the flow of information, and to solve problems.

### 4.3.3 WELL-funded training: Devonfield Enterprises

Devonfield Enterprises is a not-for-profit organisation that caters for the needs of people with disabilities. These include broader disabilities such as physical and psychological, but the primary disability is mild to moderate intellectual disability. Devonfield is a diverse organisation that provides three services. It provides training and employment, day service, and accommodation service.

The employment service of Devonfield Enterprises provides up to 89 people with jobs in various settings. One of these is Devon Industries' timber manufacturing, where people with disabilities participate in welding, packing cement, and painting pegs for the Mines and Survey Department. North West Forestry Services, another employment division of Devonfield, is a business that is contracted by Tasmanian Forestry or other private forestry groups to prune hectares of pine and eucalyptus. Three crews of fifteen people, each crew accompanied by one or two non-disabled support workers, undertake work which involves selecting trees for pruning, measuring trees, climbing up trees, knowing how to use hand-held equipment, and fertilising baby trees.

Another operation within the employment service is a catering business called Healthy Cuisine. This is a hospitality area employing people with disabilities, and support workers, at three locations. APPM in Wesley Vale provides food services to the mill workers, another provides food services for the workers at Simplot in Devonport, and there is also a kiosk in Devonfield's community health centre that provides food services to all the people within the building. Healthy Cuisine also caters for public functions.

Devonfield also has a youth hostel in the tourism and hospitality field, operated by caretakers who have an intellectual disability.

Devonfield's goal is to integrate people with disabilities into the general community. With opportunities for nationally-accredited training made available to employees, open employment options are more accessible and are being actively pursued. In supporting a submission for WELL funding for 2000, the executive director of the Tasmanian Tourism Industry Training Board wrote: 'Tourism Training Tasmania is keen to assist hospitality and tourism training initiatives which provide equitable access to accredited training and opportunities for employment for people with disabilities' (24 September 1999).

In 1998 fourteen employees with an intellectual disability participated in WELL training. Training was broken into two groups, each group receiving three hours each week over a twenty-week period. The training was based on modules in Certificate 1 in 'Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy', and was directed to specific workplace tasks. All participants completed most units, with four participants completing all units in the certificate. In 1999 WELL funding provided training in measurement and workplace communication.

In 2000 WELL-funded training assisted employees to take on units of the Hospitality Training Package. A range of standard operating practices was developed to ensure language, literacy and numeracy needs were met and to facilitate pathways to further training. Participating employees were ten employees at Healthy Cuisine Catering Service and two at the youth hostel. The project involved a Workplace Learning Services trainer working closely with enterprise employees and management to assess current competencies and training needs and identify areas for the development and implementation of standard operating practices. This was followed by work with employees to develop standard operating practices which met industry standards and the

language, literacy and numeracy needs of employees. The final stage was a validation process in which the standard operating practices were assessed by employees for their practicality and effectiveness in meeting their language, literacy and numeracy needs.

> *People want to become skilled. They want to receive recognition through qualifications for the jobs they've been doing for years. Most of our employees are existing employees. This means they have been here for more than one year. If a new person is employed, he or she will attract government incentives. But because the bulk of our people are existing, they don't attract this money, and that is an issue for us. It means we have to source funding, in order to provide them with the training that they want within their industry, in their industry setting. It's a never-ending job.*
>
> (Training and employment coordinator, Devonfield Enterprises, March 2001)

Organisations do not normally receive WELL funding after three consecutive years. Devonfield has had funding for five years.

> *We have a good track record. When I provide my progress reports in the WELL pro-forma, I also provide a report that I prepare for my own board. It explains all the outcomes — what we have noticed in our workplace — the increases in productivity, the increases in confidence levels, in self-esteem, their willingness to want to do more training, their flexibility to go from one task to another. This is all due to the confidence they've had through training. I am able to list all the outcomes. This goes in reports. And I guess that they can see that we are having outcomes.*
>
> *For this target group — being disabled — for them to be as competitive as anybody else in the workforce, they need so much assistance. WELL training gives them the foundation skills that they need. They have to have workplace English language and literacy training to be able to get out there and compete with people without disabilities. These people have an intellectual disability, they want to go on to further training, they want to pursue accredited training packages, they want to pursue open employment, and it is made so much more difficult unless they have WELL basic training to start with.*
>
> (ibid)

Former WELL trainees have progressed to qualifications in four training packages: Asset Maintenance, Forest Growing and Management, Furniture Production and Hospitality Catering Operations. One of these trainees will be nominated for a 2001 TASTA (Tasmanian State Training Authority) Trainee of the Year Award.

> *While they are doing the training, they'll come to me and say, 'Karin, when I get my qualification I can go and look for a job, and it will be the same type of qualification as someone out there, who hasn't got a disability ... I can compete with them'. That's what it's all about, that's the whole reasoning for it. To either make them more effective and more*

*productive in their own workplaces ... in their own industry here, in this supportive environment ... or to provide them with a mechanism to say, I want a job out there. I can get the same qualifications as anyone ...*

(ibid)

The training coordinator is emphatic about the need for ongoing training.

*For people with intellectual disabilities, training needs to be ongoing, because after it stops they lose a degree of the skills. They need the reinforcement. I'm still going to place submissions for WELL funding, because I want them to know there's a need for the literacy training to be ongoing.'*

(ibid)

A high proportion of WELL participants goes on to participate more regularly, actively and effectively in work and work-related activities. Communication skills have seen the greatest improvements, particularly in regard to speaking skills, such as expressing opinions, making suggestions and dealing appropriately with complaints. This is a source of great satisfaction at Devonfield. There is a recognition in this workplace that communication skills are a vital foundation for all training, and that literacy is woven through the fabric of employment.

Devonfield has an employee representative committee, the voice of the workers, made up of people with intellectual disabilities. Through WELL, they have learnt meeting skills. Participants are organising meeting times, reading minutes, taking notes and raising issues in the appropriate manner. It has also been observed that employees involved in WELL can easily be re-deployed from one workplace task to another. They respond appropriately to workplace signs, reading safety signs, work instructions and understanding work area induction information. Some employees who have been involved in WELL have applied for promotion, confident now about taking on higher-duties tasks requiring the use of reading, writing and verbal skills ('Workplace English Language and Literacy: Report for the funding period April 1999 to November 1999', internal report for Devonfield Enterprises: 1).

*All I can say, after five years of funding consecutively, the reason we have been given this money for that amount of time is because they can see that our people are developing enormously because of the training.*

*I can see results, and I can see a need, a basic need in these people to develop, personally and vocationally.*

(Training and employment coordinator, Devonfield Enterprises, March 2001)

The concept of literacy that emerges from the Devonfield WELL experience has a facet not present in the Statewide and Metro settings. Like these, Devonfield's concept is firmly linked to vocational outcomes, but in the Devonfield context, literacy is connected to aspects of an individual's sense of personal growth and social identity. This is a concept of literacy which is extensively portrayed in the

literature — for example, by Freire (1985), Fairclough (1989), Gee (1990) and Falk (1994) — and which Devonfield has arrived at naturally because of their caring and supportive role as a particular kind of disability sector enterprise. Hull et al.'s comment on workers in general applies with special emphasis to disabled workers: ' ... the most formidable challenge for workers is not ... developing a literate identity, but being perceived as capable of doing so, of being fit for the occasion' (1996: 205).

### 4.3.4 WELL-funded resource development: X Industry Training Board of Tasmania

The X Industry Training Board of Tasmania is both an industry training advisory body and a registered training organisation. The X Industry Training Package is in use.

The X Industry Training Board of Tasmania received WELL funding in 2000 to develop a CD-ROM training resource. At the time of writing this report on the role of WELL, the X Industry Training Board's resource is nearing completion, having encountered certain obstacles, some to do with the technology, others to do with concepts of literacy. Examination of the process of development of this resource offers insights into the way in which concepts of literacy held by industry may differ from those held by literacy experts. The X Industry Training Board is an industry body with a commitment to training and an involvement in training delivery. Its advice must be customised to the industry's needs, and the industry, like others, has core values relating to cost effectiveness. The ITAB's concept of the kind of training resource needed by the industry has been in some ways at odds with concepts of literacy held by specialists.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme's *Applicant's Guidelines and Information 2000–2001* defines the activities which may be funded as resource development projects, and the WELL 'target group':

> **1.8 What activities may be funded as Resource Development/ National Projects?**
>
> **Resource Development Projects**
> Projects must result in a resource that can be applied to the delivery or assessment of language and literacy training.
>
> **1.9 What are the WELL Programme Principles for Resource Development Projects and National Projects?**
> Each application for Resource Development or National Project funding is assessed against the WELL Programme Principles.

| | Group | Principles |
|---|---|---|
| A | Development | 1. Resources developed should be aligned with endorsed Training Packages. |
| B | Need | 2. There must be a demonstrated need for the proposed resource or strategy in the workplace. |

(Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme *Applicant's Guidelines and Information 2000–2001, 1.8)*

*The Project should target workers in greatest need, taking into account the worker's need for improved language and literacy skills in order to remain or progress in employment*

(Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme *Applicant's Guidelines and Information 2000–2001, 3.5*)

The X Industry Training Board of Tasmania applied for WELL funding to develop:

> *... an integrated multimedia resource on CD-ROM* [which would] *provide* workers in the Industry, including those with literacy problems, *with comprehensive self-paced materials addressing the underpinning knowledge from the National Core Competency Standards Units.*

(from 'X Industry/2000 WELL: Project Summary', provided to the steering committee, 25 February 2000)

The resource would address each of the main sectors of the industry.

> *The focus of the resource is on improvement of the workplace literacy skills of participants and on reducing barriers to learning and accredited national training.*

(ibid)

The resource would:

1. Be interactive
2. Include photographs, videos, sound and animations
3. Include interactive self-test exercises
4. Provide both text and spoken text
5. Have potential for placement on the Internet and in touch-screen interactive kiosks.

(ibid)

And, it would be guided in its development by the steering committee, validated by leading industry members in Tasmania, New South Wales and other states if possible, and would include trials such as the setting up of trial groups and an RTO mentored program, and preparing an evaluation report.

Funding was granted and development began. A consultancy, working on behalf of the ITAB, obtained guidelines for addressing language, literacy and numeracy in the development of the resource from a mainland firm of literacy and numeracy specialist advisors. These guidelines listed three key areas needing to be considered by the CD-ROM developers:

- identifying language, literacy and numeracy within competency standards;
- points to consider when developing materials for culturally and linguistically diverse audiences;
- points to consider in developing multimedia resources for culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

X ITAB says that early in the resource development process DETYA representatives and nominees on the steering committee had 'a few queries', but 'there was conditional approval'. There appears to have been some misunderstanding from the beginning. 'I guess we may not have read how strongly they wanted us to go down a certain path' (executive officer, X Industry Training Board of Tasmania, February 2001).

He added:

*We have got a contract with WELL to do certain things, and we thought we were complying with the contract. We had just completed a WELL Programme the year before that produced three learning resources, that were infinitely inferior to this one,* [but there were] *no problems at all* [with those]. *We had such a good run with WELL programs we thought this was going to be similar.*

*... I think the crux of the issue was, that we thought that our application was preparing a resource that would improve the access to the industry for individuals with poor literacy skills ... The resource in itself was not necessarily aimed at improving the literacy skills of the users but to improve their access by enabling them to pick up the underpinning knowledge that was required to work in the industry.*

But differing concepts of the resource were to emerge in October 2000 at a steering committee meeting to review developmental progress. A month before the meeting, the ITAB sent out a draft version of the CD-ROM and review sheets to a wide range of people, including the members of the steering committee, industry specialists and training providers. Some people had technical problems with the CD-ROM and their computers. These problems were mostly to do with software in users' computers. Nineteen evaluation sheets were returned by the reference group. All were positive.

| | Very Good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Language | 8 | 9 | 2 | 0 |
| Presentation | 11 | 5 | 2 | 1 * |
| Content | 9 | 8 | 3 | 0 |

* Hardware problem only

(X Industry Training Board of Tasmania, 2000 Resource WELL Project, Report on Steering Group meeting, 6 October 2000).

'Those review sheets basically tell me that there are no major problems with the useability of the resource' (executive officer, X Industry Training Board, February 2001). The draft resource was also demonstrated to an industry

conference during 2000. The ITAB gave a formal presentation to delegates who also had the opportunity to use the resource in the ITAB's booth. 'The feedback was great. People reviewed the resource at our booth. Sure, there were several technical errors, but overall the response was that the resource would be very useful and the content was good' (executive officer, ibid).

At the steering committee meeting in October 2000, however, criticisms were raised by 'the WELL representatives and the literacy focused members of the group relat[ing] to the whole approach and scope of the project and indeed how the project addresses the WELL criteria for resource development.' (X Industry Training Board of Tasmania, Resource WELL Project, Report on Steering Group meeting 6 October 2000).

Pedagogical issues were at the heart of the criticisms. Full advantage of the possibilities of the CD-ROM medium had not been taken, and it was largely print-based with pictures and voice-over. The resource did not offer the user enough opportunity to control his or her learning; it was as if the user was expected to sit with the resource and 'download', without being empowered to discriminate between content that was applicable to his or her own vocational context, and content that was not applicable (DETYA nominee, steering committee meeting, October 2000). The developers of the resource did not appear to have allowed for the fact that language, literacy and numeracy and other learning issues are often inextricably linked. 'Just because the written word is voiced over, doesn't mean it is necessarily easily understood by the learner ... Literacy is not just reading word for word. It's comprehending, and engaging with text' (DETYA nominee, steering committee, post-meeting summary of comment on the resource, October 2000).

> *Short sentences don't necessarily mean simple ... Words are sometimes placed in the script with no explanation ... Some of the language is quite dense and abstract, and will not be easily understood by many in the industry ... There are times when there is no recognition of the fact that the learner may have difficulty reading complex texts [which are recommended in the resource]. For example: in the section about the motor, the learner is told that in order to operate it they could "read the manuals or instructions in your workplace". There is no recognition that the learner may not be able to, or any strategy for getting around this.*
>
> (DETYA nominee, ibid)

The ITAB defended the resource at the steering committee meeting. A substantial effort had been made to ensure the text was in 'plain English'. But as the DETYA nominee pointed out at the meeting:

> *The WELL Programme is not about plain English. It's about literacy skills for smarter, more flexible skills in the workplace. WELL is to address the underpinning skills.*

The ITAB executive officer later said (February 2001):

> *The focus is on reducing barriers to learning ... An incidental improvement in literacy skills, as well as increased confidence was of*

*course planned and hoped for by having an aural as well as a visual version, and by using simple diagrams, questions ... But the resource, even though it was able to be used by a group that had low literacy skills, would also be useable by the wider industry. At no stage did we think there was any point in preparing a resource that was used only by those with very low literacy skills. There just isn't the demand for that style of resource in the industry. Mainly, it would have to be used by the wider industry and those with low to moderate literacy skills.*

At the October meeting, the DETYA nominee reminded those present that: 'WELL is not for developing [general] training resources'. The ITAB executive officer later explained his understanding of the extent of literacy limitations in the industry:

*The people we look at are, by and large, functionally workplace literate. They might have a few problems with reading forms. Very few have literacy problems greater than this. They're not what we would call illiterate. We've got a training arm. We see 900 participants a year in this industry through our doors. We get a really good grasp of the literacy problems. Those that have literacy problems are scraping through. They might have poor reading and writing skills, but poor rather than non-existent. In other words they could still fill in a form but not get their opinion across.*

*Of the total percentage in the industry that has literacy problems, we've targeted probably the bulk of that percentage. Plus the rest of the group. Where we haven't done really well is the bottom level of the percentage with literacy problems. In other words, this tool will not replace what twelve years of teaching have failed to do. Some of us felt at the end of that meeting we were being expected here to really get stuck into some of these literacy issues that twelve years' teaching hadn't repaired.*

*I think [the DETYA nominee] felt that ... its educative properties weren't obvious enough. The ideal way of teaching communication is obviously just to incorporate it into other competencies ... It should fit in seamlessly. They don't even know they are learning it. In other words, it's part of Oc[cupational] Health and Safety, part of all the other modules. But in practice, that's not what happens. If you go to the big TAFE providers Australia wide, there's a module or a unit from a package or from a module from a course that says "Communication". And it is dealt with in a separate stand-alone session. That doesn't mean that all the examples aren't customised from the industry. Of course they are, you couldn't make it work any other way. But it still has this stand-alone delivery. I think what [the DETYA nominee] was talking about was, they would have liked to perhaps have seen a more seamless introduction of the communications modules with the package. But we have to take note of the real world. Ask TAFE NSW how they deliver communication. They convert training packages into curriculum. So the biggest VET provider in the*


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> *country converts training packages to curriculum. That's the real world. I think it's madness. I mean, you've got training packages. They're designed to introduce that flexibility, the choices, the range of variables, all sorts of things that are denied when you convert into curriculum. But even our enterprises want stand-alone communications delivery by specialist providers.*
>
> *This is the irony. Had we prepared a resource that addressed the needs of our major critics a hundred per cent, I think it would have been much less useable in industry. If we'd had a lot of industry members at the steering committee meeting, they would have definitely said, 'We want more content in there'.*
>
> (Executive officer, X Industry Training Board of Tasmania, February 2001)

A number of changes were agreed to as a result of the October 2000 steering committee meeting. These included many technical improvements to the resource. 'The navigation is infinitely improved' (executive officer, X Industry Training Board, February 2001). The training content has been clarified by identifying must-know elements versus desirable-to-know ones. There is also now a comprehensive introduction for workplace assessor trainers that deals with literacy in the workplace.

At the time of completing the present report on the role of WELL, the CD-ROM is also making progress towards completion. Early in May 2001 a technical review of the resource was completed. A two-day workshop to come to grips with literacy and numeracy issues was scheduled with the firm of literacy and numeracy specialist advisors, after which the spoken word would be done.

The resource's developmental problems highlight a number of antitheses which may emerge from collaborative processes between industry and education. The education field has undergone a shift in pedagogical focus in two important areas which are relevant to the development of the resource. The first is with regard to goals of assisting students or trainees in becoming self-directed, autonomous learners. This involves the systemic provision of opportunities for learners to reflect on the learning process, in order to help them develop skills for identifying what they want to learn and how they want to learn. The resource, as it was in October 2000, had no strategies to allow trainees to take control of their learning.

The second shift in educational focus has been the move away from the acquisition of a finite body of knowledge and towards transferable skills that can be applied in different ways at different stages of students' or workers' lives. With the advent of competency-based training, industry has, by and large, successfully absorbed the notion of transferable skills. But the educational experience of managers and training officers tends to be one where acquisition of a body of knowledge — 'content', to use the word of the executive officer from the X Industry Training Board of Tasmania — was rewarded by the system. It will take time for the concentration on 'content' to lessen. This is all the more so because our society as a whole regards literacy as a commodity.

The concept of literacy as a commodity, which may be slotted into the resource in the final stages of the project, appears to have held sway in the development of the X ITAB resource. This concept may reflect the industry imperative with its emphasis on product, and the tendency of people in industry to regard this as the 'real world', as the ITAB executive officer also called it. The focus on product and commodity is 'real' in the sense that it is certainly the practice, not only in industry but also in a general societal climate of 'corporate managerialism' (Taylor et al. 1997), characterised by concentration on targets and outcomes, reporting systems against performance indicators, strategic planning and performance-based contracts of employment. But at the deeper level where learning occurs, this is not the primary 'real world'. At this level, in our modern, technologically aware and information-rich society, literacy is not a commodity to be grafted on to 'content'. Literacy, rather, is inextricably involved with the learning process itself.

## 4.4 Summary

Tasmanian enterprises, ITABs and RTOs take substantial advantage of the WELL Programme, and value its contribution. There is room for more extensive promotion of the program's benefits, as some enterprises may believe it has more of an educative focus rather than a workplace skills one. Financial issues connected with the funding may be a disincentive for some enterprises. The take-up of the WELL Programme, and the outcomes of WELL projects, are reflections of people's understanding of literacy and the implications of literacy factors in the workplace.

# 5. Conclusions

## 5.1 The role of WELL

Findings from this study show that the role of the Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme is regarded as being of great importance in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. This role is defined in terms of enabling access, improving communication, creating a constructive awareness of communication skills in training, and promoting a training culture which leads to wider training in the workplace.

*WELL plays a vital role in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages, by*

- *enabling access,*
- *improving communication, and*
- *promoting a training culture leading to wider workplace training.*

### 5.1.1 Access

Literacy is always an issue about access. It has a gatekeeping function. Pre-recruitment literacy and numeracy tests are the most blatant indications of this, but the access issues are ubiquitous in the workplace. Workers with limited literacy skills are especially disadvantaged when it comes to training. The very language of the training may be a barrier.

The literacies of the workplace are changing. Many workplaces are undergoing technological and cultural change. A repertoire of literacy skills is increasingly required in order to keep abreast of change. This means that workers who never thought they had literacy problems may have difficulty coming to terms with change in the workplace. The difficulty may have its roots in complex demands related to new workplace literacies.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme is widely credited with playing a primary role in breaking down access barriers in employment.

### 5.1.2 Communication

The WELL Programme is playing a major role in developing communication skills in workplaces. As enterprises experience the success of WELL projects, there is increasing recognition that communication skills are a vital foundation for all training. Improved communication and improved understanding of its role in training, gives rise to better vocational, training, social and personal outcomes.

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### 5.1.3 Training

WELL projects often initiate enterprises into training activity. They, and their workers, experience an increase in both skills and confidence, which makes them receptive to the idea of further training. A training culture becomes established. People who have been involved with WELL see the program as having an important role in achieving the benefits of a more highly skilled workforce.

## 5.2 Underlying assumptions about resources and delivery

Enterprises', ITABs' and RTOs' underlying assumptions about resources and delivery are shaped by concepts of literacy. Such concepts range across a spectrum: from highly-developed, informed ones which instil life and quality into the work of certain literacy trainers and ITAB and DETYA officers, through to narrow concepts shaped by public perceptions of literacy as a basic skills issue focused on deficits, or by industry core values relating to productivity and cost-effectiveness.

Stakeholders with highly developed concepts of literacy are enthusiastic, even passionate about the role of WELL. They point to proven benefits to industry, workplace communities, and individuals in support of their recommendation of the WELL Programme. They often emphasise WELL's contribution to social justice and equity goals. There is an underlying assumption that in our Australian society a program such as WELL is appropriate and necessary for ideological reasons as well as vocational and economic ones.

Across the spectrum of literacy concepts, however, issues emerge because of certain underlying assumptions about literacy and numeracy related resources and delivery of literacy and numeracy training. These issues may be complicated in the vocational and educational training sector and in workplaces because, as has been noted ironically, 'everybody is an expert on literacy' (Green, Hodgens & Luke 1997: 12). The vast majority of people have had their own personal experience of literacy education. 'One of the main issues is that everybody thinks they know all about literacy. It is particularly prevalent in the VET field' (DETYA nominee, X Industry Training Board of Tasmania WELL project steering committee, February 2001). This attitude may inform assumptions about literacy training delivery and about resource development. For example, it may be assumed by some that literacy support in resource development is just a matter of producing text in 'plain English'. This may lead them to assume also that WELL is for developing general training resources, as long as the language is kept simple. Specialist literacy and numeracy trainers and advisers will continue to play an important role in circumventing such misconceptions.

*Underlying assumptions about resources and delivery are shaped by concepts of literacy.*

## 5.3 Reliance on WELL

The findings of this investigation show that enterprises, ITABs and RTOs overwhelmingly believe that the Workplace English Language program is meeting its objectives and that it has made a highly significant contribution to the field of workplace English language and literacy training. All recommend continuation and expansion of the program. This illustrates a certain degree of reliance on WELL; but far from being a passive kind of reliance, this generates pro-active strategies. Training in Australia is still undergoing substantial change as enterprises, ITABs and RTOs continue to come to terms with integrated literacy and numeracy in training packages. People interviewed were positive in their outlook. At this stage, opinion is that it would be premature to curtail the WELL Programme. No one was able to suggest an alternative to WELL. Suggestions about improvements to the program were mainly about promotion or marketing of it.

*There is a degree of reliance on WELL, but the program generates a pro-active outlook.*

## 5.4 Summary

In the findings of this study, the role of WELL is defined in terms of enabling access, improving communication, creating a constructive awareness of communication skills in training, and promoting a training culture which leads to wider training in the workplace. Enterprises', ITABs' and RTOs' underlying assumptions about resources and delivery are shaped by concepts of literacy. There is a degree of reliance on WELL, but this nevertheless enables a pro-active outlook.

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